

Congress of the United States
Washington, D.C. 20515

October 21, 2021

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary, Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane, S.W.
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Ur Mendoza Jaddou
Director, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
20 Massachusetts Ave NW
Washington, DC 20529-2099

Dear Secretary Mayorkas and Director Mendoza Jaddou:

We write to commend the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) expansive policy changes regarding naturalization. In particular, we applaud the reinstatement of the 2008 civics test, continuous residence and physical presence improvements, guidance on naturalization and veterans, announcement of the Fiscal Year '21 Citizenship and Integration Grant program, and positive changes to the Request for Evidence and Notice of Intent to Deny policies for adjudications.

To build upon the progress thus far and help those who wish to naturalize, we believe you should continue and expand working towards making that process more accessible and affordable to eligible LPRs. There are approximately nine million lawful permanent residents (LPRs) – who are eligible for naturalization - that still face significant hurdles. Many LPRs have not initiated or completed the naturalization process because of barriers such as lack of information or lack of services to help navigate the application process or prepare for the exam, as well as the cost of the naturalization application. Once the application has been submitted, LPRs face additional hurdles including long wait times and extreme vetting. We have seen in previous years that LPRs remain vulnerable to losing their path to citizenship and can even be deported.

As members of Congress, we believe you should address these challenges as you further develop and implement naturalization policies. Naturalization must go hand in hand with the effort to legalize additional categories of immigrants to ensure the process is not a bottleneck to citizenship. Expanding access to naturalization can make our country more prosperous by enhancing the economic, civic and cultural contributions of LPRs. Therefore, we believe the following steps would help make the citizenship process more effective and fairer:

- **Provide information about the naturalization process and resources to potentially eligible populations.** We believe this information should be provided at adjustment of status approvals, with removal of conditions (I-751 and I-829 approvals), and with every

ten-year green card renewal (I-90) approval. Again, we commend the release of the Interagency Strategy for Promoting Naturalization and hope that this and other positive changes result from that strategy.

- **Fee Waivers for naturalization and immigration applications.** We believe USCIS should offer fee waivers for eligible applicants for naturalization and other immigration applicants. Waivers ensure naturalization and immigration status is accessible to everyone, not just those who can afford it, and will help tackle the massive backlog.
- **Implement remote interviews and oath ceremonies.** We believe USCIS should permit but not require remote interviews and oath ceremonies expeditiously during and after the pandemic to assist in balancing workload across offices and reducing processing times.
- **Appoint a Special Advisor to the Secretary of Homeland Security for Citizenship and Immigrant Integration.** We believe this advisor, preferably a naturalized citizen or expert, should be charged with working across the DHS immigration agencies and components that affect immigration to help ensure that all agency personnel respect and recognize the importance of positive interactions between stakeholders and government agencies.
- **Promote customer service and public engagement.** We believe USCIS should re-establish the USCIS Office of Public Engagement and the USCIS Office of Customer Service would help USCIS engage in regular dialogues and share information with community stakeholders.
- **Establish a process to solicit and accept donations for the Citizenship Gift and Bequest Account.** We believe the agency should fully use 8 U.S.C. § 1382 to obtain funding for grants and related activities; specifically, we believe it should revisit the feasibility of accepting private donations to support the USCIS Citizenship and Integration Grant Program. We understand that DHS has proposed examining this option in the Interagency Strategy to Promote Naturalization, and we strongly encourage the agency to use this opportunity.
- **Improve agency policy related to immigration data transparency and the naturalization process by providing more information and data.** We believe these statistics should include the naturalization exam pass rates by fiscal year and USCIS district; data on the annual number of fee waivers and reduced fees requested and approved for the Form N-400; data on the number of disability exceptions waivers (N-648s) requested and approved; and the cost breakdown used to determine individual fee levels.
- **Finally, please provide an update to Congress on:** (1) The current naturalization application backlog, both nationwide and at individual field offices; and (2) current naturalization application processing times, both nationwide and at individual field offices.

Thank you for your consideration of the above recommendations. We believe that we are a nation where all eligible immigrants can realize their dream of U.S. citizenship, and we look forward to working with you to achieve this important goal. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Amanda Hines from Congresswoman Torres' office at Amanda.Hines@mail.house.gov, Judith Teruya from Congresswoman Meng's office at Judith.Teruya@mail.house.gov, or Lanette Garcia from Congressman Garcia's office at Lanette.Garcia@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,



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Member of Congress



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